



ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS OF ASSAMESE MEDIUM SCHOOL'S STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The English pronunciation of the students of Assamese medium school is comparatively poor and the students hesitate to speak out aloud English words. This study will try to find out the causes and the remedial measures for the problems. The paucity of adequate trained English teachers in the Assamese Medium schools of Assam is of the prime causes of the students' poor English pronunciation. Here, we will find out the phonetics issues of relating the English pronunciation of Assamese spoken students. The purpose of my study is to determine the most commonly mispronounced words by Assamese EFL learners and the estimated reasons for the errors.

KEY WORDS: English pronunciation, phonetics, Assamese medium students, LLS.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is taught in the vernacular medium schools of Assam as a second language. Assamese orthography is to a large extent phonemic, i.e. employing one-to-one letter sound correspondence. Assamese students, accustomed to a system like this, are confused when they try to read English words, because in English a total 44 sounds are represented by 26 letters. In a study performed by two linguists, Aro and Wimmer (2003) among primary school students showed that even native English speakers find it difficult to guess the correct pronunciation of written words. English is a stress timed language while Assamese is a syllable timed language. For that reason some English words have two different pronunciations; the weak one is used when the word occurs within a sentence. In the process of English pronunciation, articulation, juncture, stress, rhythm, intonation is used.

2. METHOD AND PROCEDURE:

For this study I have pursued the Case Study method as the method of collecting and analyzing the data. For the purpose of study, a set of 10 students have been nominated from class VIII of Kuworital High School (Kaliabar, Nagaon, Assam). The following steps are used to conduct the case study.

The first step is to determine the present status of the case or cases through direct observation. In addition to physical examination of the case or cases, a psychological evaluation is required to determine the general ability level etc. For example, to make a case study of 'incorrect pronunciation in English', the first thing to do is to determine the present status of the child by making an assessment of his physique cognitive factors through direct observation.

Determining the most probable antecedents of the case or cases is the next important step. This information helps in formulating a workable hypothesis. For example, in case of 'incorrect pronunciation in English' cited in the first step, the researcher may formulate a hypothesis that occurrence of the problem in the child is due to unhealthy environment, bad study habits and poor teaching in the school.

Third step is the verification of the antecedents. The case is then checked for the presence or absence of the antecedents supposed to apply to situation of under study.

After the verification of the antecedents or hypothesis, the next step is directed towards the diagnosis of the causes and suggesting remedial measures in the light of the causes.

The last step of the case study is the follow-up of the case to study the impact of remedial measures. If impact is positive, the diagnosis is taken to be correct.

2.1 Tools and procedure of data collection

For the study of this research, the tools that have been taken to collect data are observation, questionnaire and the audio visual recording.

3. DISCUSSION

At first some selected students of the class are asked to read a given passage from their text. The teacher listens carefully and notes the words which the students cannot pronounce or pronounce incorrectly. After that test the class teacher reads out aloud and slowly the passage from their text and the students are required to listen carefully and to note the stress, intonation, correct pronunciation of the difficult words. The teacher also writes the tricky words on the black board with

their phonetic transcription.

"...I found Burlington House Nursing Home easily enough. There were paper chains up in the hallway and a lighted Christmas tree stood in the corner with a lopsided angel on top. I said I was a friend come to visit Mrs. Macpherson to bring her a Christmas present. I could see through into the dining room where everyone was wearing a paper hat and singing. The matron had a hat on too and seemed happy enough to see me. She even offered me a mince pie. She walked me along the corridor. "Mrs Macpherson is not in with the others," she told me. "She's rather confused today so we thought it best if she had a good rest. She has no family you know, no one visits. So I'm sure she'll be only too pleased to see you." She took me into a conservatory with wicker chairs and potted plants all around and left me."

(The Best Christmas Present in the World, Honeydew, 15)

The above underlined words have been mispronounced by the students. The teacher now writes them on the black board besides their transcriptions.

Table 1: Incorrect pronounce by the students from the given text

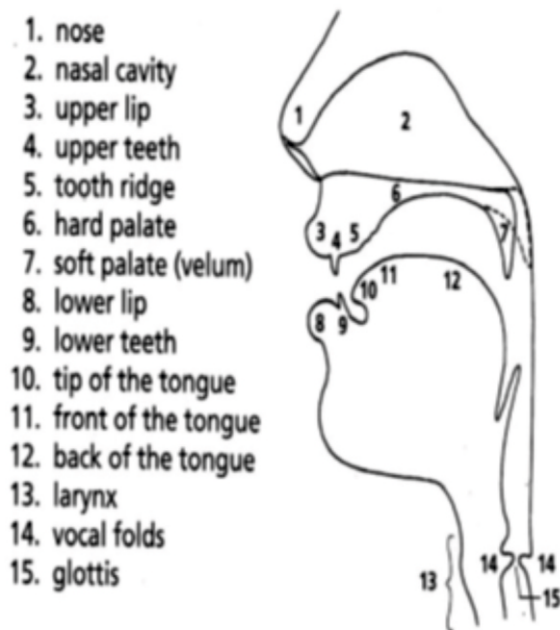
Words	Correct Pronunciation	Incorrect Pronunciation by the Student
Enough	/ɪˈnaʃ/	/eɪˈnaʃ/
Lopsided	/lɒpˈsaɪdɪd/	/lupˈsaɪdɪd/
Angel	/ˈændʒ(ə)l/	/ˈendʒ(ə)l/
Paper	/ˈpeɪpə/	/ˈpApət/
Mince	/mɪns/	/mɪnk/
Pie	/paɪ/	/pɪ/
Confused	/kənˈfjuːzd/	/kanˈfjuzd/
Wicker	/ˈwɪkə/	/ˈwɪkər/
Chair	/tʃeɪ/	/tʃeɪt/

3.1 Remedial Measure:

To carry out these pronunciation problems among the students we need to do a remedial measure. The action researcher organizes a training program of LLS (Language Learning Strategy) in the class and then the teacher wants to see the progress of the students in case of pronouncing those words. Then again a well trained teacher is needed to consult the problems, which has mastery over the subject, who can deal with the students regarding the pronunciation problems of the students. These two kinds of remedial measure can be put in the class to improve the English pronunciation of the students. If we give the students of class VIII from Assamese medium school to consult a pronunciation dictionary (i.e. Oxford Pronouncing Dictionary), that will be totally an absurd kind of thing because they cannot undergo those technical terms of the phonetics and morphological and the syntactical terms of English language. They are quite a very delicate position in this matter. So it will be better if we give them a demonstration class on the LLS and the other articulation mechanism of pronunciation. For these remedial measures, the teacher takes the entire class students. First day class, the teacher makes the LLS program of articulation. He demonstrates the chart of articulatory function, demonstrates how mouth organ relates to the pronunciation, which part of a mouth and other organ is required to pronounce a particular sound. The

teacher draws the mouth and uses the demonstration chart to articulate the entire fricative, affricative, labio dental, velar etc. For this test we have organized a class training program of pronunciation in English.

Image 1

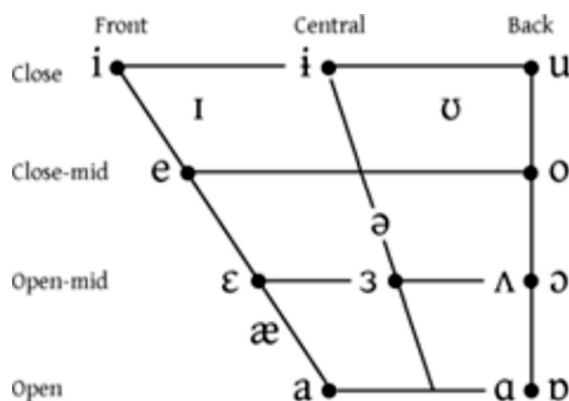


Side View of the Speech Organs

Image 2

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Stop	p b			t d			k g	ʔ
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Approximant					j	j	w	
Lateral				l				

Image 3



After this training class, it is clear that the students even the teachers can get the knowledge of articulatory process of English pronunciation that how a word is pronounced, what are the organs involved in the pronunciation process of that particular word. It simplifies basically the phonetics of the language. Without a language laboratory we can teach the students at least the basic pronunciation of the English language in the smaller class. It genuinely helps the teacher as well as the students of a vernacular medium school.

3.2 Post test:

In this post test period, the students are asked to read the above given passage repeatedly. The selected students can read the passage with fewer mistakes in pronunciations. But then it cannot provide the teacher satisfaction, because the

teacher cannot be assured whether the students can read the other texts without any pronunciation mistake or not. So the teacher gives some other new passage from the textbook to evaluate the selected students' acquisition of learning.

4. THE SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of my study is to determine the most commonly mispronounced words by Assamese EFL learners and the estimated reasons for the errors. In this study pronunciation errors are limited to the following.

- The emission of a sound
- The attachment of a sound
- The usage of a different sound instead of the required sound

The followings are the some points sorting out from the entire study why the students from the Assamese medium school mostly have the inappropriate English pronunciation:

- During the evaluation, participants frequently mentioned problems caused by phonemes that do not exist in Assamese. Phonemes such as /f/, /v/, do not exist in the Assamese language. They found them rather difficult to pronounce.
- Assamese students often find it difficult to pronounce some borrowed English words with French and Latin or Greek origin. They find it very difficult to guess the correct pronunciation of borrowed words some of which are listed below.

Word	correct	incorrect
Mosque	/msk/	/mskju/
Technique	/teknik/	/teknikju/
Vague	/veg/	/vegju/

- Words that may be pronounced in different ways, according to their roles within different sentences. For instance, the same word may be used as a verb and adjective without changing the morphological construction but the pronunciation will be different according to grammatical function. But EFL learners often find it difficult to understand such differences. As can be seen in the following examples.

Content (V, Adj)	-----/kntent/
Content (N)	-----/kn.tent/
Present (V)	-----/przent/
Present (N, Adj)	-----/prez.nt/

- Silent letters: In some English words there are some letters which should not be pronounced by the speaker. Assamese speakers of English have problem with these letters. People end up in pronouncing those letters, although they should be silent there. Since Assamese speakers are accustomed to a letter-phoneme correspondence, they tend to pronounce these letters.

Words	correct	incorrect
Palm	/pɑ:m/	/pɑ:lm/
Dumb	/dʌm/	/dʌmb/
Half	/hɑ:f/	/hɑ:lf/
Often	/ɔfən/	/ɔftn/

- Sometimes Assamese students pronounce only vowel, although they should pronounce a diphthong. As a result, it is not easy for the listeners to differentiate between 'paper' and 'pepper' or 'taste' and 'test'.

Word	correct	incorrect
Ancient	/eɪnfənt/	/ensfent/
Change	/tʃeɪndʒ/	/tʃenz/
Nation	/neɪfən/	/nesn/
Hatred	/hetɪɪd/	/hetɪɪd/

- Assamese students find difficulty in case of derivatives. Generally, in case of words that share a derivation, there exists a significant difference in terms of pronunciation. For native Assamese speakers of English it becomes difficult to guess the correct pronunciation of these kinds of words.

Words like: analysis, resign, resignation, repeat, repetition etc.

- Because of its usage in Assamese, when some learner see the 'o', they tend to pronounce it like the English phoneme /ɔ/. However, most of the time, the letter corresponds to weak /ə/ phoneme.

Words	correct	incorrect
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History	/ 'hɪstri/	/his.t ɔri/
Consider	/kən' sɪdə/	/kɒns ɪdr/
Purpose	/p ʌ: p əs/	/p ərp əs/

As seen from the above research, Assamese learners of English make over generalization when they pronounce English words. Since it is not possible to listen to the correct pronunciation of every word, students try to guess the pronunciation of every word by looking at the spelling. As seen in this analysis, English spelling system makes it very difficult for students to pronounce the word correctly by relying on spelling alone. Difference between English and Assamese orthography is also one of the chief reasons which is also called orthographic interference.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of my study prove that due to the lack of well knit lesson plan and well equipped methods of language teaching in the Assamese medium schools are the prime barrier of incorrect pronunciation of English language. Besides the teachers of English are not quite good in English pronunciation i.e. lack of B.Ed degree, lack of language teaching skill, not well verse in English. The teachers as well as the entire school authority are not giving importance on teaching English. They are not adopting Language Learning Strategies (LLS) for the improvement of English pronunciation.

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